

THE MIGRATION OF THE PIED CRESTED CUCKOO
(*CLAMATOR JACOBINUS*)

BY

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(*With a map*)

It has long seemed to me discreditable to all of us who work at Indian Ornithology that we have made no serious endeavour to work out the migrations of so conspicuous and easily recognized a bird as the Pied Crested Cuckoo. The words 'a rains visitor' run like a refrain through all accounts of the species, but I have never seen any attempt to show where it goes to or comes from at other seasons of the year, and this is given as its status in so large an area of India that one is tempted to wonder where it can possibly live for the remainder of the year as it is not found to the east or south of India save in a small area in Burma and in Ceylon. It is however found in a considerable part of Africa, and I have often wondered whether this Cuckoo can be amongst that small company of species that winter in Africa after summering in India.

In hopes of throwing light on the question I have recently devoted some time to collecting and collating records of the occurrence of the Pied Crested Cuckoo. The results of this collection have been disappointing but it is perhaps worth laying them in front of the readers of our Journal in the hopes of persuading them to assist in throwing light on the question.

I start with the north-west corner of India and proceed to relate what I can find on the subject.

In the N. W. F. Province the bird is very scarce.

That careful observer Whitehead, in his survey of *the Birds of Kohat* (*Ibis*, 1909. 254) says that it occurs rarely during the autumn migration and that he met with it on three occasions, in August and September.

Briggs never met with it at Peshawar in the five years that he was there.

In the Northern Punjab it is not uncommon, and gradually grows more numerous as one approaches the east and south of the province. Of this there is plenty of evidence and it is clear that in the province it is a rains visitor arriving for the purpose of breeding. To detail the evidence:—

At Rawalpindi I saw a pair in the Topi Rakh on July 9, 1911. Mr. B. B. Osmaston obtained a specimen at Rawalpindi on November 3, 1924; this is a young male of the year and may be considered as a lost straggler as there is no other winter record for the province known to me.

Briggs saw a single bird on August 1, 1925 about ten miles out of Rawalpindi on the Murree Road.

It is commoner in the Jhelum District both in the plains and plateau and in the Salt Range. In 1913 I met with about six individuals in the district between June 15 and September 4.

Theobald says (*N. and E.* ii. 388) that at Pind Dadan Khan and Katas it lays in August. Mr. H. W. Waite reports that it turns up pretty regularly in July and August in the Jhelum Salt Range and that in 1926 he saw several of them at the end of June and took an egg from a nest of *Argya caudata* on June 29 at Sethi 2,600 ft. He also reports that it is fairly common at Sargodha in the rains.

South of this area it is common in Jhang District, arriving at the beginning of June and leaving by the middle of September; during its stay it breeds in the district (*Ibis*. 1922, 405). Somewhere below Jhang there is possibly a gap in its distribution as indicated under the head of Sind, but its apparent absence is probably due to a dearth of observers.

In the Central Punjab the bird is very common. At Gujranwala (*J. B. N. H. S.*, xxiv, 701) in 1915 I found that they arrived in the first half of June and for the first week or two were very noisy and conspicuous while courtship was in progress. After breeding they started to leave again early in August and had practically all gone by the end of the month.

Dewar implies (*J. B. N. H. S.*, xviii) that at Lahore it is only a passage migrant as he says that it appears 'for a few days in July and August', but Currie (*J. B. N. H. S.*, xxiv, 570) states that it is found there from June to September and makes it clear that it breeds during that period. He saw a young bird still with its foster-parents as late as October 16 (*loc. cit.* xxiv, 595). I have a note from Mrs. Wathen of two young still with the foster-parents on October 14 (1921) at Amritsar. At this station Meinertzhagen found it throughout June.

At Ludhiana in 1917 I did not meet with the Pied Crested Cuckoo in June but saw it first on July 1. It was very common and noisy throughout July and August, and about the middle of September it began to grow scarce, though a few stragglers were noted until October 3 (*J. B. N. H. S.*, xxvi, 592).

In Ambala district Mr. A. E. Jones notes (*J. B. N. H. S.* xxxi. 1005) that it is widely and commonly distributed in July. Cordeaux (*Ibis*, 1888, 224) also says that it is very common at Ambala in the hot weather.

At Hissar it is very common in the rains. In 1914 I saw the first on June 6, but it was not common till July; from July to the middle of the September it was plentiful and a few were noted until October 1.

In Rohtak District Mr. A. H. Marshall tells me it occurs in the rains though he did not find it common.

At Delhi I have heard it on July 1 and 2, when I was passing through. A September specimen from Gurgaon near Delhi is in the Hume collection.

So much for the Punjab proper; its status in the Punjab Himalayas and contiguous areas remains to be recorded.

I find no record north-west of Gilgit where on June 15, Biddulph

procured a female, 'apparently breeding' which had been killed by a native (*S.F.* ix, 315). This is now in the British Museum.

In Kashmir it occurs regularly but sparingly as a summer visitor. According to B. B. Osmaston (*J. B. N. H. S.* xxxii, 140) it frequents the lower bush-covered slopes of the hills near Srinagar between 5,000 ft. and 6,500 ft. Ward had a specimen dated May 29, and had seen others in the valley as for instance at Martand (*J. B. N. H. S.* xvii, 108). Lawrence says the call is heard most commonly at the beginning of the rains in July (*Valley of Kashmir*, 1895). Abbot obtained specimens both adult and immature in the vale of Kashmir between August 12, and September 1, 1891 (*Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus.*, xviii, 451). Cordeaux obtained a specimen at Verenag on June 15, 1887 (*Ibis*, 1888, 224).

Currie records that he once heard it at night at Murree in the hot weather (*J. B. N. H. S.* xiv, 595), and I myself saw it at Kothi (5,000 ft.) near Murree on May 27, 1911. Two undated specimens obtained at Murree by Biddulph and Col. Way are in the British Museum.

Along the Kangra Valley and in the Mandi State up to about 5,000 ft., it is a fairly common rains visitor, arriving in June and remaining until September. I saw a single bird at Chakki on October 9, 1921 (*Ibis*, 1926, 750).

In Kulu the Pied Crested Cuckoo is not uncommon in June and July in the Lower Beas valley round about Bajaura (*J. B. N. H. S.* xxxi, 477) and I have heard it also at Banjar, 5,500 ft. in Saraj. On June 28, M. Babault obtained a male with the organs in breeding condition at the upper edge of the forests at 12,500 ft. at Rahla by the Rhotang Pass (*J. B. N. H. S.* xxxi, 477.) Stoliczka (*Ibis*, 1868, 320) met it at Serahan 9,000 ft.—10,000 ft. and Urni 6,000 ft.

In the Simla Hills, Jones states (*J. B. N. H. S.* xxvi, 615) that it is very common in the cultivated areas up to 5,500 ft. and occasionally found up to 8,000 ft.

He gives no dates but Beavan obtained specimens at Simla in July and September 1866 (*Ibis*, 1869) and there are three July specimens from Simla in the Hume collection as well as a pair from Fagoo, dated July 29, 1868. On the Simla-Mussoorie Road in June 1867 Tytler saw several after leaving Thaena in the valley of the Jumna (*Ibis*, 1868. 202). Meinertzhagen saw it at Chakrata on May 17 and June 11. At Dehra Dun according to Thompson (*N. and E.* 2nd ed., ii, 388) it is very common and lays in July and August and he adds that he has seen it in Gurhwal during the breeding season though it is not common there. Two adults from Naini Tal (September) and one from Almora (August 13), are in the Hume collection. Brooks saw it a few times at Almora (April to June 1868, *Ibis* 1869, 47).

In British Baluchistan the Pied Crested Cuckoo apparently does not occur. In parts of Sind however it is common and here also as in the Punjab as a rains visitor. Ticehurst's account (*Ibis*, 1923. 39) is explicit as follows, and it absolves me from recounting earlier records in the province. 'A visitor in the rainy season and not uncommon. It arrives at Karachi about the beginning of June (earliest date May 29) and I think must leave again in September. I once

saw quite a number in some desert jungle near Karachi on September 16, where I know they did not breed, and these were evidently working their way south . . . a few may still be met with in October, the last was seen on October 30. Barnes found eggs at Hyderabad on August 20, in nests of *Argya caudata*, and Doig thought it bred in June and July in the East Narra District where it is common. From Upper Sind there are no records, nor does it so far as I know occur west of Karachi.'

In Cutch, Kathiawar, Gujerat and Mt. Abu, Butler tells us that it is a 'seasonal visitant, only occurring in the rains, at which season it is tolerably common' (*Bombay Gazetteer*). Elsewhere (*S. F.*, iii, 461) he says in more detail about Mt. Abu and Northern Gujerat that it is 'very common both on the hills and in the plains, arriving just before the monsoon. It lays freely in July during which month in the neighbourhood of Deesa I have seen a great number of the eggs.' Later (*S. F.*, v. 227) he says again of Deesa that it occurs only in the breeding season and he gives the dates of arrival and departure as May 25, and October 20. There is an adult male in the Hume collection from Anandra near Mt. Abu dated July 5. A specimen from Kathiawar, evidently collected at Rajkote, cf. *Ibis*, 1873, 407, shot by Col. Hayes Lloyd on June 11, is also in the British Museum.

In the desert region of Rajputana it appears to be rare or wanting or more dependent on the state of the rainfall, for I only find that it was obtained by Adam at the Sambhur Lake. In *Stray Feathers*, i, 372, he says of it 'very rare, obtained in July' but there are however two of his birds in the British Museum dated August and September respectively.

I now pick up the thread where we left it at the boundary of the Punjab and the United Provinces, and pursue it southwards from there returning afterwards to deal with Bihar and Bengal.

Of the United Provinces as a whole Gill says (*J.B.N.H.S.*, xxx, 282) 'makes its appearance with the advent of the monsoon; breeds from about July to September.' This is supported by several local records.

There are three birds in the British Museum collected by A. Anderson in Futehgarh District in July and August, as well as a bird from Etawah.

At Agra Adam found newly-fledged young being fed by the Large Grey Babbler on August 13, (*N. and E.*, ii., 388). At Lucknow, it is true, Reid declared it to be 'fairly abundant at all seasons' (*S. F.*, x., 27), but Jesse corrected this by the statement that it does not appear till the beginning of June after the rains have commenced and that he had never seen it after September, except for a single bird in November 1901 (*Ibis*, 1897, 556 and 1903, 58). At Gonda, Field says it is common in the rains (*J.B.N.H.S.*, xxviii, 762). It is common all over Gorakhpur District according to A. E. Osmaston (*J.B.N.H.S.*, xxii, 541), but he says nothing of its status.

Major Hingston informs me that at Fyzabad it arrives at the beginning of the rains, first noted in 1921 on June 14, and that it was common until at least July 19. There is in the British Museum a juvenile male obtained by A. Anderson at Goorsehingunge,

just below Fyzabad on August 11, 1876. Two birds, also in the British Museum, collected by Brooks at Moghulserai are however dated November and January. The Hume collection contains an egg collected at Allahabad on July 28. In the British Museum there is an adult bird killed at Jhansi in August and eggs taken there on June 28, (Blewitt), July 18, and in August (Blewitt).

With reference to Central India, especially round Mhow and Neemuch, Swinhoe and Barnes (*Ibis*, 1885, 63) say that the Pied Crested Cuckoo is 'very common after and during the rains. It breeds throughout the monsoon quite up to the end of October, depositing its eggs in the nests of *C. caudata*.' An adult male collected by Col. Swinhoe at Mhow on October 6, is in the British Museum.

At Mhow in 1927 Rev. F. S. Briggs writes to me that he observed it as follows: July 29, a single bird; September 21, a pair at Jeshwantnagar twelve miles S.W. of Mhow; September 30, a juvenile bird; October 7, a single bird.

At Sehore, Whitehead (*J.B.N.H.S.* xxi, 162) says it is abundant during the monsoon and he gives the dates of arrival and departure as June 5, and October 13. For the Central Provinces I find the following records. At Saugor and Damoh, Moss King (*J.B.N.H.S.* xxi, 97) includes it in his account of the resident birds as common, but I do not think he is using the term resident in its technical sense. The Hume collection at any rate contains an adult female and a juvenile collected at Saugor in July. There is also in the British Museum an egg taken by J. A. Kemp at Jubbulpore on July 2.

One was seen at Pachmarhi near Foxrock on July 14, by Capt. R. S. P. Bates (*J.B.N.H.S.*, xxx, 918).

To continue down the western side of the Peninsula. Barnes records that an egg was taken at Baroda by Capt. Sadler. Davidson is very explicit about Western Khandesh: 'arrives early in June, 4 he says, 'is very common in all the scrub jungles round Dhulia,' laying in the nests of *A. malcolmi* and *C. caudata* . . . it leaves about September' (*S.F.*, x, 299). Two of his specimens dated June and July are in the British Museum.

At Bombay and in the surrounding district, says Kinnear (*J.B.N.H.S.*, xx, 537) there is every year a large influx about the first week in June, while the birds depart after the rains. I personally saw one in 1925 near Bombay on October, 5 and Swinhoe saw one there between November 10-14, 1863 (*Ibis*, 1864, 416). Fairbank records it without comment at Ahmednagar but two immature males obtained by him there in October and November are in the Tweeddale collection in the British Museum. There is also a November specimen from Matheran in the Hume collection.

Meinertzhagen saw it at Poona on September 2, and a specimen collected there by Capt. P. H. G. Gosse, on August 15, 1918, is in the British Museum. Fairbank records it without comment from Mahableshwar (*S.F.*, iv, 255). In his paper on the South Konkan (*S.F.*, ix, 55) Vidal says, 'Devrukh, rare. Has been seen also at Daputi and on the summit of the Amba ghat in the Kolapur District.'

Here we appear to reach the southern limit of the Pied Crested

Cuckoo as a common rains visitor. For while Davidson and Wenden (*S.F.*, viii, 79) say it is common in the rains and believed to breed in the Deccan, i.e. in the valley of the Bhima, Butler elaborates the position as follows (*S.F.*, ix, 388):—

Deccan and South Mahratta country. 'Seasonal visitant. Occurs I believe only in the rains. Generally distributed throughout the region, but much more common in the north than in the south. In fact in many of the southern districts, for instance Ratnagiri, Belgaum, etc., it only occurs as a straggler.' One of Butler's birds from Belgaum, dated August 25 is in the British Museum.

Yet Macgregor on the other hand says (*S.F.*, x, 437) that in Belgaum District it is 'very common at all times of the year, frequenting low thick jungle whenever it occurs north of the Malprabha River.'

I will now return to North-east India and trace the bird's status down the eastern side, before dealing with its apparently somewhat different status in Southern India.

To deal with Bengal first. In that province Jerdon says it is only at all common in the rains (*B.I.*, i, 340) and Hume says (*N. and E.*, ii, 388) that its breeding season in Bengal is the same as in the Punjab and United Provinces, i.e., latter half of June, July and August. It breeds at Darbhanga in June (*J.B.N.H.S.*, xvii, 50 and 893). In Jalpaiguri District, Inglis says it is common in the plains from April to November (*J.B.N.H.S.*, xxvi, 999). In Sikkim it does not occur which makes all the more curious the capture of a single specimen (♂) on June 20, 1921 at Tingri, 74,000 ft. by the first Mount Everest Expedition (*Ibis*, 1922, 504). This skin is in the British Museum but the label bears the date June 30.

At Fareedpore, Cripps says (*S.F.* vii, 265) it is very common during the rains, at the close of which it leaves the district; he saw the first bird on May 15. At Dacca it is 'very conspicuous at the end of the rain's' (Simson, *Ibis*, 1882, 87). In the Calcutta District, with special reference to Titaghur on the Hooghly twelve miles north of Calcutta Munn says (*Ibis*, 1894, 55) that it is 'common and generally distributed, but only during the rainy season—the earliest arrival I have noted was on May 18, 1890—and leaving again after the rains, at the end of September. They commonly deposit their eggs in the nests of *C. canorus*.' Beavan procured a solitary specimen at Barrackpore on September 28, 1864 (*Ibis*, i 1865, 413). A specimen in the British Museum from Calcutta is however dated January.

Ball says it occurs in Chota Nagpur, but very rarely: he saw one in the eastern part of Manbhum, and he also shot it at Birbhum. Lohardugga he gives as another locality (*S.F.*, ii, 394). A. McLevin however seems to have found it more common in Palamow (*S.F.*, iii, 290).

In Assam it appears to be by no means general. Stevens only observed it once in North Assam, an immature bird found in Dejoon, North Lakhimpore on September 25, 1910 (*J.B.N.H.S.*, xxiii, 558). Hume had no record of it from the Valley of Assam though he received it from N. E. Cachar (where Inglis says he only met it once, in May 1876, *S.F.*, v, 27) and from Shillong, where Godwin-Austen says (*J.A.S.B.*, 1874, 155) it is common in June. In the

Khasia Hills it is common according to Stuart Baker (*J. B. N. H. S.*, xvii, 4) and the Tweeddale collection contains an adult male, dated August from Siong in that area. Stuart Baker records that he shot one of these cuckoos on May 15, 1892 at Gunjong, N. Cachar, from the nest of *Alcippe nepalensis* in which it had laid an egg (*J. B. N. H. S.*, xvii, 50).

In Manipur, Hume considered it rare and adds, 'I saw it perhaps five or six times in the basin and shot two, but I never observed it in any part of the hills (*S. F.*, xi, 76). One of the specimens dated May 23 is in the British Museum.

With Burma we meet the easternmost boundary of the Pied Crested Cuckoo. In Upper Pegu it is common. Jerdon says (*B. I.*, i, 349) that it is more abundant there than anywhere else he has observed it. Oates says it is common in the scrub-jungle round Thayetmyo and as far south as Promé and Engmah, while he has traced it to the foot of the Pegu Hills on the east (*Birds of B. Bumah*, ii, 118). Unfortunately neither of these authors hint at the bird's status in Burma, an unfortunate omission from the point of view of my enquiry. The British Museum collection however reveals that Wardlaw-Ramsay collected an adult male and two females at Thayetmyo in September and that Oates obtained an adult male and female at Palow and Boulay, Upper Pegu, in May and August.

Down the eastern coast I can find no records until one comes to Madras, whence the British Museum possesses an undated skin of Jerdon's and one of Davison's, dated April. Jerdon states in general terms that it is common in the Carnatic.

It remains now to treat of Southern India where as I hinted above there is apparently a change in the status of the Pied Crested Cuckoo which we have seen hitherto mainly as a rains visitor. Satisfactory details are however lacking.

According to Rhodes Morgan (*Ibis*, 1875, 315) it lays from March to May in Southern India, and Hume says that in the Nilgiris it appears to lay in January, February and March—the breeding season of the various local Babblers (*N. and S.*, ii, 388). The Hume collection contains an egg from the Nilgiris, dated February 22. Davison (*S. F.* x, 360) says it is a common bird in the Nilgiris, being most numerous perhaps about the cultivated land in the vicinity of Ootacamund, Coonoor, Kotagherry and similar places. He also saw it occasionally in the Wynaad and not unfrequently in the Mysore country. He says nothing of its status but specimens in the British Museum furnish dates as follows:—Coonoor August 23; Kolar, Mysore, April 13, 1868; Muddur, Mysore, May 22.

In the British Museum there is an egg taken at Aptoor, Salem District, on August 18, by A. G. R. Theobald.

South of this I find no more records in India beyond Jerdon's statement that it breeds at Coimbatore, but Hume obtained a female on March on Rameswaram Island (*S. F.*, iv, 457).

Cinghalese birds are now accepted as forming a separate race *Clamator jacobinus taprobanus*, but that of course would not necessarily prevent Indian birds being found there also as winter visitors. Legge's account (*Birds of Ceylon*, 247) is as follows:—'Widely

distributed over the low country of Ceylon, but is subject to a partial migration away from the wet regions on the western and south-western seaboard, during the prevalence of the S. W. Monsoon; Colombo, November and December. Arrives in Galle District at the same time. In the scrubby jungles of the Girawa and Magam and Pattus and throughout the Eastern Province, in the jungles between the Mahawelliganga and the coast, in the maritime portions of the north and west, as far south as Chilaw, it is a resident species, and is abundant in some districts. It is partial to those dry districts which are covered with low scrub, such as the neighbourhood of Hambantota, and many similar spots on the east coast, the Jaffna Peninsula, the north-west coast, and the island of Manaar, as also the Puttalam and Chilaw District. I have seen it occasionally in the interior of the northern division of the island, but it is scarcer there than in the maritime portion. It ranges into the Central Province to a considerable elevation, occurring in Uva upto 3,000 ft.; but in the western portion (to wit, the valley of Dumbara and adjacent districts) it is not found at such an altitude.'

Wait's account (*Birds of Ceylon*, p. 227) appears to be merely an epitome of the above but he adds that he has taken eggs from November to June and again in August. An oviduct egg was obtained in November at Puttalam (Legge, *S. F.*, iii, 366).

The Tweeddale collection contains seven specimens killed in Ceylon in November and there are two other specimens in the British Museum from Colombo, dated March 12 and December 28. Lewis records that he obtained a specimen at 2,300 ft. in the Balangoda District during the N. E. Monsoon (*Ibis*, 1898, 349).

I have now enumerated such evidence as I can find on the subject of the distribution and status in our area of the Pied Crested Cuckoo. It remains to summarize the results and see what deductions can be made from them.

It is quite clear that the bird is an abundant rains visitor for breeding purposes over a very large portion of India; that is in the Punjab and United Provinces with their outer Himalayan slopes, about the mouth of the Ganges, in Central Assam and perhaps in Upper Pegu; and again in Lower Sind, Mt. Abu and Central India and in the Bombay Deccan. Whether the extent of these areas is conterminous remains to be verified. The dates of arrival and departure are slightly variable but this is only to be expected with a bird whose movements are clearly connected with the rainfall.

It is also clear that the bird is very common in a patch of country about Mysore and the Nilgiris but its status here is not clearly recorded; and it is possible that this area is merely a northern continuation of the range of the Ceylon race *C. j. taprobanus* which appears to be a resident form with slight local migrations.

There is a huge extent of country from Darjeeling straight down the eastern side of the Peninsula to Bellary where I can find no information about the bird.

It is obvious therefore that we need a great deal more information about this bird in India, both as to its distribution and its status. It is so common, so easily recognized by its handsome plumage and

so conspicuous with its loud calls that much of the required information must be already in the possession of the members of the Society. May I ask our members to communicate either to me or to the Journal the information that they already possess, and also ask them to make notes on the occurrence of the bird for the next year or two in the neighbourhood of their stations. With more data it should then be possible to clear up the situation about this bird.

The point at issue is whether the Pied Crested Cuckoos which are rains visitors to a huge area of India winter in India or in Africa. A cuckoo absolutely indistinguishable from our bird is found in a considerable part of Africa, as well as other closely allied forms. It is possible therefore that our bird should be numbered in the small series of species which summer in India and adjacent areas and pass south by the Arabian route to winter in Africa. There are difficulties in the way of this view amongst which the chief is that the Pied Crested Cuckoo is believed to breed in parts of Africa and there lay a *white* egg, whereas in India the egg is now well known to be always *blue*. There is on the other hand the difficulty against the view that the Pied Crested Cuckoo winters in India that we cannot say at present where so great a mass of individuals can winter unrecorded; it can only be in Southern or South-eastern India or in Ceylon.

Legge's evidence appears to have ruled out Ceylon. As to Southern and South-eastern India we have no definite evidence either for or against the supposition. Surely some of our members can fill in the gap. Any information at all about any part of India will be most welcome, especially as regards areas not marked in the accompanying map.

BATTLE, SUSSEX,
January 10, 1928.

